



# House Select Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

**JIM TURNER, Ranking Member**

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**March 25, 2004**

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*Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security gave the following statement at the hearing today of the Select Homeland Security Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism and Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security on the progress in Consolidating Terrorist Watchlists*

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to join with colleagues from the Judiciary Committee to address a subject that is enormously important to our homeland security – determining our progress in integrating multiple government terrorist watchlists and assessing the Terrorist Screening Center's overall performance since its creation last December.

I appreciate the witnesses coming before us to answer questions that will be, as they probably expect, rather blunt and tough. It is worth emphasizing, to start, that our criticisms are meant to be constructive. I believe strongly in the mission and goals of the Terrorist Screening Center, value tremendously the hard work and dedication of the personnel serving there, and want to contribute in any way I can to the Center's successful operation.

But the reason we are here is because two and a half years after 9/11, we still do not have a fully integrated watch list database to identify and apprehend potential terrorists.

What does that mean in practical terms?

It means that someone could still slip through the cracks because the government is not able, in real time, to check a name against every available watch list of known or suspected terrorists.

This is true when the police pick up a suspect, when border inspectors are deciding to let someone in the country, and when consular officers are reviewing visa applications.

For a function that is absolutely vital for our homeland security, the delay in completing this project is unacceptable. The damaging effects, I would submit, are incalculable since we cannot even begin to know what opportunities have been missed to arrest, question and prosecute possible terrorists. And of course we know that if we had this capability prior to 9/11, two hijackers might not have been permitted to board airplanes that fateful day.

More backsliding and excuse making ought to be met with the stiffest, bipartisan criticism. Responsibility for this task shifted four times during the first two years after 9/11. And since the responsibility for the project has been given to the FBI, the deadline for completing it has been moved from December 2003, to March 2003, to mid-summer, and now to December, 2004. There cannot be any further delay.

According to the experts with whom we have consulted, there are no technological barriers to getting this job done. It is a matter of will.

Leadership by the Administration needs to be exercised at the highest levels to ensure this latest deadline is met. And we need the entire government to be on the same page. It was striking to me that the same week Secretary Ridge announced that this project was one of his top goals for 2004, a senior official in his Department questioned whether watch list consolidation was even necessary.

I want the message to be clear – there is a bipartisan consensus in Congress that we need to forge ahead as rapidly as possible to implement a robust, agile, and comprehensive terrorist screening capability through consolidation of all existing government watchlists.

Through vigorous oversight we have tried to help the process along. Four months ago Democratic Committee Members prepared a concise list of ten attributes that we believe ought to be the cornerstone of the Terrorist Screening Database now being built by the TSC. As we elaborate in the report, we believe that the Terrorist Screening Center must be, among other things, comprehensive ... accurate ... accessible ... timely ... flexible, and correctable. So, for example, even once watch lists have been integrated, the TSC cannot be considered fully operational until the information is accessible to everyone who needs it: border patrol, immigration inspectors, local police, and federal law enforcement.

Consistent with a letter I sent to the TSC earlier this week, I hope to hear more from your testimony and comments today to help us judge the progress that has been made – and remains to be made – in ensuring that the Terrorist Screening Center possesses the ten attributes that are vital to its successful operation.

One related issue that I hope you could comment on is whether all the right people even know about the TSC. My staff was on the border earlier this month and were told that border patrol is not generally aware of or linked to the TSC. Likewise, we had a discussion yesterday with a state homeland security director who said that local law enforcement in his state was not aware of this important resource.

In closing, while progress is being made, I think much more needs to be done. I thank the witnesses for their willingness to be here this afternoon and look forward to their testimony.

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